For the better part of ten hours

the droning hum of the Pan Am propellers put me in a state of drowsy indifference. Then, suddenly, my childhood dreamscape of Hawai'i—sparked by a chance encounter with a book on the Islands at Public School 63 in Buffalo, N.Y.—was made real. There it was: Pearl Harbor, the graceful curve of O'ahu's shoreline and Diamond Head. The whirring of the engines sputtered to a halt, a portable stairway was wheeled up and then—gently, delightfully—I felt the warmth of the sun and a fresh breeze.

A quick stop at the Short Snorter Bar on the edge of the tarmac, and then I was in the car of Professor Glick and driving toward Mānoa Valley, the University of Hawai'i and the teaching assistantship in sociology that awaited me.

In Chinatown, at the corner of Smith and King streets, I saw the most handsome man I'd ever seen: thick mane of white hair, bronzed, clear-eyed, square-jawed, with a frame exuding vitality and purpose. Any place that produces such a person, I thought, must have qualities of life and properties of culture I'd never experienced anywhere on the East Coast.

But the world he represented was about to change forever. Two weeks before—in the wake of *nisei* soldiers returning from World War II, the tsunami of Democratic victories in the 1954 Territorial Legislature and the election of working-class favorite John Burns to the US Congress—Hawai'i had become a state. The air was full of optimism and confidence; statehood was something almost everybody wanted because it represented equality and opportunity. Statehood also represented modernity and change meant to spur progress. Fifty years ago, no one knew what that change would look like: The jet planes and mainland millionaires had not arrived, and the US military had not morphed into a Pacific Command astride all of Asia. The world I entered was still the world of the Waikīkī beach boys and *Hawaii Calls*. The Legislature met in a palace. The Columbia Inn served oxtail soup 24 hours a day. King Street ran two ways. Traffic lights were few. And cows grazed on the Mānoa campus I was bound for.

Once settled at the professor's hillside home just off O'ahu Avenue, I couldn't sleep. I wandered with the creeping darkness toward the university and beyond, marveling at the stars. I felt I'd never known what the heavens actually were until then.

My reverie was halted as I approached the junction of University Avenue and Beretania and King streets. Just up from the intersection was a sign: Paris Café. I had to investigate. Inside it was nondescript. I walked up to the small bar at the rear—a newly minted graduate of Union College in Schenectady, all brush cut and Bermuda shorts—and sat on a stool to the right of several men. Conversation stopped, followed by small smiles and stares. I announced I'd just arrived to teach at the university and would appreciate an introduction to Hawai'i and the neighborhood. The smiles broadened, and hands were extended and shaken.

"Aloha, brah."

"Your first day, fo' real?"

"New York, fo' real?"

The bartender said what I needed was to experience a little local culture and that I'd come to the right place.

"You have to try some pupus. You drink, you eat local style. You ever try chopsticks?"

A dish of what seemed to be salad appeared in front of me. Instructions on chopstick protocol were issued. A bottle of Royal Beer—"drink local, bruddah"—materialized. Awkwardly, I grasped the chopsticks and decided the better part of honor required me to use them shovel-like to heave a huge portion into my mouth. Kim chee!

I watched faces light up as I desperately tried to swallow as fast as I could. I grabbed for the beer. Let's just say the flavor of the Royal was unique. "Royal Beer—right from the Ala Wai to you, brah." Somehow, I choked it all down, teary-eyed and trying not to gasp. By now everyone was standing and applauding.

"Welcome to Hawai'i."

"Good job!"

"Aloha."

That world too has all but disappeared. Not just the Paris Café, but the Kuhio Grill, the Denver Grill, CoCo's, the Tahitian Lanai and, of course, the Columbia Inn. Roy's, Alan Wong's, even Sam Choy's are not the same thing. They're not even close.

As the fiftieth anniversary of statehood approaches, I am filled with nostalgia for the place that embraced me when I arrived as a young man—and also with a sense of the irony inherent in statehood: Yes, Hawai'i wanted the change that statehood has brought, but we also wanted everything to stay as it was. That is, what we really wanted was for everything to change but us. **HH**

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[Story by Congressman Neil Abercrombie]

PAU HANA